

Visitors Promotion Committee
Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce
May 22, 2024
MINUTES

In Attendance: Jeff Barclay, Jeff Cunningham, Jason Hoehne, Tim Savona, Aaron Stitt and Riley Slezak

Absent: Tare Knuth, Bryan Sullivan, Dave Derbin, Bennie Shobe and Rick Vest

Staff Attending: Jeff Maul, Derek Feyerherm, Jason Ball, Ron Kalkwarf, Diane Pryor and Katie Bohlmeier

Call to Order and Introductions:

Chairman Aaron Stitt called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. He welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. He asked the attendees to introduce themselves and for that to serve as the roll call.

Approval of February Minutes:

Chair Stitt asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the regular quarterly meeting in February's minutes, that had been sent out ahead of time in an email to the group. There were no comments, so he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Jason Hoehne made a motion to approve the minutes and Jeff Barclay seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Jeff Cunningham, Hoehne, Tim Savona, and Stitt voted yes. Tara Knuth and Bryan Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Approval of April Financials:

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials showing the Visit Lincoln Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual for July 2023 through April 2024. Beginning with Room Tax-CVB, he said, and began a recap. The budget is 1/12 of the annual budget and we continue to request funding as needed. Other Income is higher than budget due to higher advertising in the Visitors Guide and because of grant income offsetting expenses we incurred for several months as we waited for the grant to come in, which it now has. On the Expense side, Salaries are down a bit as we had budgeted for a position that was left unfilled. Equipment/Maintenance is up a bit due to office equipment upgrades. Printing is higher because of the Visitors Guide; Professional Fees is over as we have been working with CueMotion on some special projects and Sports Event and Event Promotion-CVB are down due to funds not being needed as some budgeted events did not materialize. Kalkwarf said, Net Income is \$0, with no profit, no loss. Jeff Maul clarified that event promotion "events not materializing" is showing the few events we budget for that don't happen. At times, these funds are then used for events that do come up unexpectedly. Stitt then asked for a motion to approve the financials. Savona made a motion to approve the financials and Hoehne seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Cunningham, Hoehne, Savona and Stitt voted yes. Knuth and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Visit Lincoln Fiscal 2024-25 Budget:

Next, Jeff Maul presented the proposed July 2024 through June 2025 budget for Visit Lincoln. Before Maul presented the proposed budget to the group, he said Visit Lincoln is funded by lodging tax receiving 2% on an annual basis and this will be the first year we are back to being funded by the tax and not ARPA funding. He looked at Income first saying the Room Tax-CVB and Bid Fees are what we use to get events here. Room Tax-CVB has a 4.4% increase and Room Tax-Bid Fees is being budgeted with a 10.6%

decrease. Other Income is the non-tax revenue and sponsorships, and we see a 13.6% increase in budget. He said we are happy with where we're at. He next went through the Expenses. Salaries are up only by 1.1% because of the position not filled that was in last year's budget and Commissions are up 35.5% to incentivize our Director of Sports. Travel & Training expense will be reduced a bit as we are doing three fewer tradeshows this year. Auto Expense is down, and Garage Rental & Parking and Equipment/Maintenance are both up because of increased costs with parking, garages, Visitors Guide material and software. Both Maul and Derek Feyerherm talked a bit about the use of new software that can aid the travel industry in tracking visitors to Lincoln, where they come from and what they do while here. It'll be a game changer, Feyerherm said. Maul said we are using CueMotion video and social media more and that has increased the budget for Professional Fees. In Advertising, we have added funds to support the Chamber Economic Vitality earned media need. We see Event and Sports Event Promotion down because of no promotion fund grants as requested by the County. Bottom line is a Net Income of \$175, There were no further questions on the proposed budget and Chair Stitt asked for a motion to approve. Barclay moved to approve the budget as presented. The motion was seconded by Stitt. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Cunningham, Hoehne, Savona and Stitt voted yes. Knuth and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried. Maul said the budget will go to the County for review and approval next.

VPC Committee Seat Updates

Stitt let everyone know Jeff Cunningham's term on the Committee is expiring after eight years. The June meeting will be his last and Stitt thanked him for his years of service on the Committee. Stitt said as a replacement, Todd Ogden from the Downtown Lincoln Association, has been nominated and would serve from July 2024 to June 2028. Stitt asked for a motion to approve Todd Ogden to join the Committee. Savona made a motion and Barclay seconded it. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Cunningham, Hoehne, Savona and Stitt voted yes. Knuth and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Next, Stitt said we have a replacement recommendation from the Chancellor of the University of Nebraska. Ernest K Franks, the Director of University Relations, will be replacing Michelle Waite. He will start in July 2024.

Directors Report:

Stitt asked for the directors' report. Jeff Maul began with a convention center update. Assemble Lincoln continues to meet monthly working on local funding and public engagement. They are staying cognizant of the turnback tax as a major investment for the project as they keep things moving along. Legends consulting firm, the project consultant, will help us through the opening. The architect and conceptual design team has been chosen. It is a national firm, Populous, teaming with our local Clark & Enersen. The RFP for a site yielded four privately owned areas including the open area on the Hudl block, Oak Lake development, a site east of the Cornhusker Hotel and the Golds Building site. In addition, five public sites are under consideration. After review and sub-committee work, we hope to have a final site selection by quarter four, in October – December, Maul said. Additional public events will be held through the summer and fall to gather public feedback. Stitt asked if the group has focused on what is around the sites to support it. Maul said they are looking at the environment and infrastructure around it and the future potential. He also said they are looking at a recommended 129,000 square foot facility that would be slightly larger than Kearney. The recommended internal programmable space would include a 30,000 square foot exhibit space with breakout ballroom and meeting spaces. It would have the potential to hold 200 events and provide 230 jobs per year. Both Maul and Feyerherm said, to answer Tim Savona's question about how many people they would expect at an event, 2,000 attendees is the expected headcount for events in the event hall and up to 1,000 in the ballroom. We believe this will draw state and regional markets and will even look to national and international groups. We will be looking at what makes it work,

we will look at the flow and parking. We want something Lincoln loves, a civic destination, someplace to meet up for coffee or lunch. We want to keep the building busy, Maul said.

With an update on the Sandhills Global Youth Complex, Maul said, we are on track to open early 2025 for full play for Wesleyan in spring 2025. The dirt work is complete, and the lighting is starting to go up. The general manager search brought in 119 applicants, and they narrowed it down to three. An offer will be made soon, he said. Riley Slezak commented that the Mayor's office is excited about it. There was a discussion about who will govern the fields and Maul said a non-for-profit will govern and operate it. Maul said to follow the progress on social media and the website, Lincolnyouthcomplex.com. Maul next presented a picture showing the progress and pointed out the various fields.

It's National Travel and Tourism Week and we are excited to be sharing social media features on staff favorites and video featuring local attractions. The governor made a statewide proclamation on Monday, he said. We kept an eye on the legislature as they attempted to sweep \$5 million from state tourism. It was reversed after a statewide effort by tourism professionals. We are working with the DED and State Chamber to get the word out about how important tourism is to the state.

Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next with a sales breakdown. Visit Lincoln has issued 90 sales leads for 47,078 room nights. Of that, 40% of the leads are for new events, 64% of the leads are for national events and 12% are for regional events. In definite bookings, we had 73 events booked for 28,774 room nights. Of that, 26% of the booked rooms are for new events, 68% were national and 19% were regional. He said new business was down from where we like to be.

Next, Feyerherm gave an update on tradeshows the staff has been attending with the Select Traveler show in Buffalo, NY on March 17-19 yielding 31 appointments. There was a CMCA conference in Asheville, NC Marc 19-21 with 22 appointments. Kelsey Meyer and Clay Simpson went to Chicago and DC on sales missions in March and April and had nine appointments in Chicago and 12 in DC. They came back with several RFP's. Feyerherm said, we continue to build relationships there and they are paying off. In addition, Derek Bombeck attended the Sports ETA Symposium in Oregon in April and had 30 appointments.

We now have 100% participation of the new additions, Washington, Oregon, UCLA and USC, in our Cities of the Big Ten, Feyerherm said next. We will have a Passport Program launching around July 1st to encourage folks to visit all 17 cities of the Big 10 for sports travel as well as vacations. We just held an Army Divisions Association fam tour with five associations over 2 ½ days. Feyerherm gave kudos to Simpson as he handled everything wonderfully. Visit Lincoln staff are investing time in local organizing committees for events including Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association which will bring 5,000 motorcyclists to Lincoln. The mayor is very supportive of this, Slezak commented.

Chair Stitt said that all sounds great and thanked both Feyerherm and Maul for their work.

New Business:

In new business, Stitt asked everyone to give a brief business update, if they'd like to. Jeff Barclay went first saying they are looking forward to spring. Business is stable, he said, and they've had some good hires lately. Barclay said they're in good shape. Jason Hoehne said they will see it pick up this summer at their two locations. He has seen an uptick of Lincoln serving the smaller communities around Lincoln and it looks like it's going to be a good year even with a lot of last-minute planners.

Jason Ball said the Boise trip is filling up nicely and he believes it will be successful. The mayor is coming

and will participate in a panel of the three mayors. We have over 80 attending, he said. Ball said there is still a good chance we will have a special session as the governor works for property tax relief. We look at it as a tax shift and are concerned it will be a statewide tax shift with some people losing and some winning, Ball said. Tim Savona spoke next and said Pinewood Bowl opened for the season with four shows and 15,000 people attending so far. There will be 12 shows this season, he said. PBA has been busy with graduations and the arena will be kind of quiet now until August. He said they are looking at a big fall and continue to work on long-term events. Aaron Stitt said the Courtyard had a little softer start. May and June look fantastic, he said, and they've had quality applications to grow their staff. Residence Inn is going great, he said, and plans to open in May 2025. He offered tours to the group.

Jeff Cunningham next said the Farmer's Market is going really well and they may need to move back to Canopy Street for more room. February's Chocolate Lovers event went very well. They are looking at a possible shopping event coming in September. Riley Slezak said they are excited for the opening of the Sandhills Global Youth Complex and the South Haymarket Park project. They are working to improve it and bring in more attractions. He said the special session uncertainty is felt by them, too. Katie Bohlmeier said she's been busy with two main initiatives, the East Beltway and Lincoln on the Move (LOTM). LOTM is working with the Growth is Good coalition and seeing progress. The beltway project is further out, but month after month there is good news to report, she said. Things are going well.

Jeff Maul gave an update last and said our next meeting will be June 5 at 12:05 pm in our building on the 4th floor. We will have ten grant requests to review so we need to stay on time. Maul asked the committee to be sure to review the requests prior to the meeting and let him know if they can't make it. We have \$500,000 in the pool, he said, and the requests total more than that, so will need to be prepared and diligent.

Adjourn:

Stitt thanked everyone again for their attendance and wished them a great Memorial Day weekend. He adjourned the meeting at 2:38 p.m.